

XXXVIII.—*Letters, Extracts, Notices, &c.*

WE have received the following letters, addressed "to the Editor" :—

Buenos Ayres,
Jan. 28, 1890.

SIR,—I wish to inform you that in the figure of *Chatocercus burmeisteri*, published in 'Argentine Ornithology' (vol. ii. pl. xi.), there is a slight error. The two small stripes of crimson-red, shaded with violet-blue, on the throat, are represented as separated by an interval in the middle; whereas they are united there by two rows of smaller feathers of the same colour, and in this manner form a bilobed half-collar.

At the point immediately under the beak there are some small white feathers, like a beard. These are not shown in the figure.

Yours &c.,
H. BURMEISTER.

Topclyffe Grange, Farnborough,
R.S.O., Kent.
Feb. 28, 1890.

SIR,—Some time ago, when examining specimens of Rollers for the purpose of writing a monograph of that family, I found, on comparing examples of the White-necked Roller (*Coracias nœvia*) from various parts of Africa, that there are certainly two clearly separable forms: one which has the crown rufescent or vinaceous pink, inhabiting Abyssinia, the Upper White Nile, Somaliland, Senegambia, and the Niger district; and the other, which has the crown pale olivaceous green, inhabiting the Congo, Angola, Benguela, Damaraland, Mozambique, the Transvaal, and South Africa generally.

I have not yet fully made out the geographical ranges of these forms, but, so far as I can at present judge, the rufous-crowned form is only found north of the equator, and the olive-crowned form south of the equator.

Heuglin has remarked (Orn. N.O.-Afr. i. p. 173) that there appear to be two forms, but he did not refer to the difference in the coloration of the crown, and tried to separate the southern and western birds from the north-eastern form. Captain Shelley (Ibis, 1885, p. 399) has pointed out the distinctive character in the coloration of the crown, and has separated the two forms correctly, but has only made a subspecies of the southern form, referring the northern species to *Coracias nævia*, and giving to the southern species the name *Coracias nævia levaillantii*.

I have been lately working out the synonymy of the Rollers, and, as it appears to me that the olive-crowned bird should be treated as a good species, the question arises as to what specific name it should bear. The specific names already bestowed on these two Rollers, which have hitherto been generally united, are as follows :—

nævia, Daudin, Traité d'Orn. p. 258 (1800).

pilosa, Latham, Ind. Orn. Suppl. p. 27 (1801).

crinita, Shaw, Gen. Zool. vii. part 2, p. 401 (1809).

nuchalis, Swainson, B. of W. Afr. ii. p. 110 (1837).

levaillantii, Rüppell, Syst. Uebers. Vög. N.O.-Afr. p. 23 (1845).

Of these, the first, *nævia* of Daudin, undoubtedly refers to the northern or rufous-crowned species, as the author states that the crown is red, and gives the habitat as "Senegambia." Latham's *pilosa* appears to be also referable to the northern species, but his description is very meagre, and he merely gives "Africa" as the habitat. Shaw's name is based, as was Latham's *pilosa*, on the Hairy Roller of Latham (Gen. Syn. Suppl. ii. p. 27) and no description is given. Swainson's *nuchalis* is also most certainly the northern species, as he states that the crown is "vinaceous red;" and Rüppell's *levaillantii* must also refer to the northern species, for though he gives no description, he states that it is "common in the lowlands of Abyssinia." I may here remark that Rüppell refers to this bird as "*Coracias levaillanti*, Temminck," but I cannot find that this name was ever published by Temminck.

From this it will be seen that all the specific names hitherto applied to the two species refer properly to the northern form, and I can see no alternative but to give a fresh name to the southern or olive-crowned species. I propose therefore to call it *Coracias mosambicus*, retaining the name of *Coracias navius* for the rufous-crowned (or northern) species.

Yours &c.,

H. E. DRESSER.

Edinburgh, May 3, 1890.

SIR,—In a small collection of skins lately received from Madeira, I find a specimen which Mr. Salvin has identified as *Æstelata mollis* (*Procellaria mollis*, Gould, B. Austr. vii. pl. 50). This bird was taken on the Ilho de Baixo, off Porto Santo. This is a fact which you may consider sufficiently interesting to place on record, more especially as I understand that there are two specimens of the same bird in the Cambridge Museum, obtained (as I am informed by Prof. Newton) some 35 years ago by Mr. Robert Frere from near Madeira. Although rather a rare species, it seems by no means improbable that it may be yet found breeding upon some of the other rocks of the Madeiran group.

Yours, &c.,

JOHN J. DALGLEISH.

Butorides virescens in Cornwall.—At the Meeting of the Linnean Society on the 17th April last, Sir Charles Sawle exhibited a specimen of the North-American Little Heron, *Butorides virescens*, which had been shot by his keeper, W. Abbott, on the 27th of October, 1889, on his estate, Penrice, St. Austell, Cornwall. The specimen was brought to Sir Charles in the flesh, and forwarded to Mr. Foote, birdstuffer, Bath, for preservation.

Butorides virescens has a wide distribution over North and Central America and the Antilles, and likewise visits the Bermudas*. There is therefore no antecedent improbability of

* See Reid, Bull. U.S. Nat. Mus. No. 25, p. 244.

occasional stragglers being met with in Western Europe, though this is the first recorded example killed in Great Britain.

Phylloscopus superciliosus in the Scilly Islands.—Mr. J. H. Jenkinson (Crowborough, Tunbridge Wells) sends to 'The Field' (April 12th, 1890, vol. lxxv. p. 518) the following letter:—

"In 'The Field' a short time ago it was announced in a letter from Brighton that Messrs. Pratt had identified a bird temporarily in their possession as '*Phylloscopus superciliosus*,' the Yellow-browed Warbler, which had been shot several years ago in the Scilly Islands. More definite information respecting its capture was asked for, but was not given, and it would probably therefore be supposed by readers of 'The Field' that some mistake had been made, and that the bird in question did not belong to this rare species. It is therefore satisfactory to be able to state that Messrs. Pratt were quite right in believing the bird to be the 'Yellow-browed Warbler,' and that it has been duly identified at the Natural History Department of the British Museum. The bird was shot in October, 1867, by Mr. A. Pechell, in the Scilly Islands. I found on writing to him, that I had been with him there at the time, and on looking back to my notes of that year, I found that I had written a careful description of the bird, and of its general appearance, &c., before it was shot. The note especially was observed to be unlike that of either the Goldcrest or the Firecrest, and there were other differences, which made it very doubtful whether the bird belonged to either of those species. However, having been sent over to Mr. Rodd, it was settled by him and Mr. Vingoe that it was an immature Firecrest, and as such it has remained in Mr. Pechell's possession ever since. A few days before this bird was obtained, Mr. Pechell had shot one exactly similar to it, but it was so injured by the shot that no attempt was made to preserve it. I found, a day or two ago, that I had kept a wing of this bird, which is of itself quite sufficient to identify the bird as being of the same species as the other. These two birds make the third and fourth specimens which have

occurred in Great Britain. The first was obtained by Mr. John Hancock in September, 1838, near Newcastle, and appeared in the old editions of Yarrell as the 'Dalmatian Regulus,' the second example was obtained at Cheltenham in the same month and year as Mr. Pechell's two birds."

Turtur orientalis in Great Britain.—At the Zoological Society's Meeting on May 6th last, Mr. Seebohm exhibited a specimen of the Asiatic Turtle Dove (*Turtur orientalis*), which had been shot near Scarborough on the 23rd of October 1889. This species (*cf.* Dresser, B. Eur. vii. pl. 463, p. 45) is new to the British list, but is said to have occurred twice in Scandinavia.

Valuable Addition to the National Bird-Collection.—Mr. F. DuCane Godman, F.R.S., has made another valuable donation to the great Bird-collection in the British Museum in the shape of a nearly complete series of birds from Florida, U.S.A. This consists of about 2500 skins collected by the well-known American naturalist, Mr. W. E. D. Scott, in various parts of that State.

The Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum.—Amongst the preceding notices of recent Ornithological Publications in this Number will be found one of the fifteenth volume of the British Museum Catalogue of Birds, containing the account of the Tracheophonine Passeres, which has just been issued. Before the present number of 'The Ibis' is published, the thirteenth volume, by Mr. Sharpe, containing his account of the last remaining families of the Oscinine Passeres, will probably have also been issued. These two volumes render the catalogue of the great order Passeres complete. The 13 volumes devoted to this subject, of which the first was issued in 1877, recognize 6480 species of Passerine Birds, represented in the Museum, at the times of publication of the several volumes respectively, by 61,034 specimens. But enormous additions, it must be recollected, have been made of late years to the groups catalogued in the earlier of these volumes.

The next four volumes of the Catalogue will be devoted to the Picariæ, and are said to be all in a more or less forward state. That on the Woodpeckers, by Mr. Hargitt, will, we believe, be issued very shortly. Our Honorary Member, Count T. Salvadori, has undertaken the volume on the Parrots (which, we suppose, will be the twentieth), and he will be resident in London during the autumn for the purpose of preparing it.

New Bird-books in preparation.—Mr. Dresser is preparing a supplementary volume to his ‘Birds of Europe,’ and has, we believe, nearly 100 species to add to his former work. Mr. Sharpe has made arrangements with Messrs. Sotheran and Co. to publish a Monograph of the Paradise-birds, for which, we understand, the plates contained in the ‘Birds of New Guinea’ will be utilized, as far as they are available. Mr. Seebohm is now engaged in passing through the press a work on the Birds of Japan, and has, besides, a Monograph of the Thrushes, with coloured figures of all the species, in preparation.

+ *Pelagodroma marina in the Canaries.*—Mr. Bartlett, during his recent visit to the Canaries, picked up a specimen of *Pelagodroma marina* dead on the sea-shore near Las Palmas, on the 26th February. Its occurrence in the Canaries has already been noted by several observers (*cf.* S. G. Reid, *Ibis*, 1888, p. 81; Tristram, *Ibis*, 1889, p. 14; Meade-Waldo, *Ibis*, 1889, p. 517); and it probably breeds on some of the adjoining islets, but few specimens of this Petrel have yet been obtained in this locality. Concerning its synonymy, *cf.* Salvin, in Rowley’s *Orn. Misc.* i. p. 228.

Anniversary Meeting of the British Ornithologists’ Union. 1890.—The Annual General Meeting of the British Ornithologists’ Union was held at the rooms of the Zoological Society, 3 Hanover Square, on Wednesday, the 21st May, at 6 P.M., Mr. P. L. SCLATER, M.A., Ph.D., F.R.S., in the Chair.

The Minutes of the last Meeting having been read and confirmed, the Committee presented their Report, in which it was stated that, in accordance with the resolution passed at the General Meeting of the Union in 1889, the vacant Secretaryship had been filled up by the appointment of Mr. F. Du Cane Godman, F.R.S., to that office.

The accounts presented showed the position of the Union at the close of the year 1889. The cost of the volume for that year had been somewhat in excess of the previous one. This had been mainly caused by its greater size and by the larger number of plates. Moreover, it contained an Index of Contents, occupying 8 pages, which was a new feature in the annual volume.

Since the last Annual Meeting, as the Committee regretted to have to remind the Members, a great loss had been suffered by the death of Mr. John Henry Gurney, one of the original Members of the Union. Mr. Gurney was a most active and zealous ornithologist, and had been a constant contributor to and liberal supporter of 'The Ibis' since its foundation. The Union had also to regret the death of Mr. John Marshall, of Taunton, who was elected a Member in 1885.

Lord Clifton had resigned his Membership, and another Member had been removed under the rules, for non-payment of his subscription. Notwithstanding these losses, the number of Members continued to increase, and there were at present on the list the names of 194 Ordinary, 1 Extraordinary, 8 Honorary, and 19 Foreign Members, making a total of 222.

The following Ordinary Members were then balloted for and declared duly elected :—

Frank Barclay, Knott's Green, Leyton.

Harry Brinsley Brooke, 33 Egerton Gardens, Kensington.

Charles Cave, Ditcham Park, Petersfield.

James A. G. Drummond-Hay, Coldstream Guards,
Guards' Club, Pall Mall.

Lionel Fisher, Kandy, Ceylon.

William R. Ogilvie Grant, 6 Stanhope Place, Hyde Park, W.

Joshua Reynolds Gascoign Gwatkin, Manor House, Potterne, Devizes.

Henry Charles Vicars Hunter, 7 Bury Street, St. James's, S.W.

Thomas James Monk, St. Anne's, Lewes, Sussex.

Albert Irving Muntz, Umberslade, Birmingham, and Trinity College, Cambridge.

C. M. Hayes Newington (Major, King's Regt.), Lee, Kent; and Army and Navy Club.

John Tristram Tristram-Valentine, 1 Sheffield Gardens, Kensington.

Stephen Venour, Fern Bank, Altrincham, Cheshire.

The following Honorary Members were also elected :—

Hans, Graf von Berlepsch, Münden, Hanover.

Count Tommaso Salvadori, Zoological Museum, Turin.

The following Foreign Members were also elected :—

M. Emile Oustalet, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Jardin des Plantes, Paris.

Dr. Emin Pacha, Bagamoyo, East Africa.

Joel Asaph Allen, American Museum Natural History, Central Park, New York.

The former President and Secretary were then re-elected, and Mr. R. Bowdler Sharpe was elected into the Committee in the place of Mr. E. Bidwell, who retired by rotation. The Officers for the year 1890-1891 will therefore be as follows :—

President.

THE RIGHT HON. LORD LILFORD.

Secretary.

F. D. GODMAN, Esq., F.R.S.

Editor.

P. L. SCLATER, Esq.

Committee.

O. SALVIN, ESQ.

HOWARD SAUNDERS, ESQ.

R. BOWDLER SHARPE, ESQ.

After a vote of thanks to the Chairman the Meeting adjourned. The Annual Dinner, subsequently held at the Café Royal, was attended by thirty-two Members and guests.

Obituary. Mr. J. H. GURNEY.—By the death of Mr. JOHN HENRY GURNEY, on the 20th of April last, not only does the British Ornithologists' Union lose another of its founders, but 'The Ibis' one of its most constant and munificent supporters. Our deceased Member, the only son of Joseph John Gurney, of Earlham in the county of Norfolk (celebrated for the various philanthropic undertakings to which he devoted the leisure of his life), was born on the 4th of July, 1819, and at the age of about ten years was sent to a private tutor, who lived in Epping Forest. Thence he went to the Friends' School at Tottenham, and on leaving it, being then about seventeen years old, entered the banking business at Norwich, in which his family had long been so successfully engaged. His love of natural history showed itself very early, and the writer of these lines was told by him of his getting into a serious scrape at school by dissecting a bird on a mahogany desk, which immediately afterwards revealed the secret of the use to which it had been put as an operating table, by the stains on its polished surface from the camphorated spirit (supplied to the boys as a cure for colds, and the only antiseptic liquid available) that he had employed to avert the possibility of unpleasant odours from his "subject."

During his school-days in Essex he made the acquaintance of Mr. Henry Doubleday, of Epping, so long known for his ornithological and entomological collections, and from him obtained, in 1836, an introduction to the equally well known Mr. T. C. Heysham, of Carlisle, with whom he kept up for many years a correspondence, chiefly on zoological matters—

sending him from time to time birds, mostly obtained in Norfolk; for at this time Gurney had not begun a collection of his own. That his generosity was then as great as it continued in after years is shown by his letters to Heysham, which have fortunately been preserved, and have been kindly placed at the service of the writer of this notice by their present custodian, Mr. H. A. Macpherson, giving almost the only information to be obtained as to this period of GURNEY'S life. They will compare well with those written by any other youthful zoologist. Zeal is of course to be expected in a greater or less degree, and here it is found to be in the former; but it seems to be in all cases tempered by a sober judgment; and, if a partiality be observable towards whatever relates to the zoology, and especially the ornithology, of Norfolk, it must be remembered that this was the subject on which the writer undertook to inform his correspondent, while as the correspondence advances, what may be called its breadth of view decidedly increases. Moreover, it seems to be strictly according to the fitness of things that a young naturalist should begin by paying attention to the objects which, being the nearest to him, come the more closely under his observation, for thus he is able to proceed from the known to the unknown—the surest mode of acquiring knowledge. There have been possibly few men who could, at the age of nineteen, write as GURNEY did to Heysham on the 8th of February, 1838:—

“Though I can seldom or never resist the temptation of procuring a tolerable bird in the flesh, when opportunity occurs, I care very little for them after I have once *learnt them by heart*, as I contrive to preserve them almost as well in my memory as I could hope to do in my cabinet. I therefore generally palm their remains off on some of my friends; because, though I know that in themselves they often are worthless, yet I always fancy that there is some interest in comparing specimens of the same bird from different localities.”

This last must have been an original observation, as it was made before the question of the local variation of species had

been publicly mooted ! He went on to say " it seems to me impossible that any stuffed specimen can bear much resemblance to the living bird,"—a remark which, even allowing for a general improvement of the taxidermist's art, is, on the whole, as true now as it was then.

GURNEY'S earliest published communication seems to have been a note in the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History' for March, 1842 (vol. ix. p. 19), and was followed by another in the same journal for June (*tom. cit.* p. 353), the subject of both being ornithological occurrences in his own county. In the next year 'The Zoologist' was established, and to this he became a frequent contributor, publishing in the volume for 1846, with the aid of Mr. W. R. Fisher, "An Account of Birds found in Norfolk,"—a very careful piece of work, and for a good while the most ambitious that he attempted, though he was constantly communicating short notes to that periodical, and did so for the rest of his life. When the scheme for founding 'The Ibis' was proposed, he entered warmly into it. He not only attended the meeting held at Cambridge in the autumn of 1858, when the preliminaries were definitely arranged, and by his advice helped to mould into a practicable form various proposals then made, but he liberally promised to defray the cost of a plate for each number of the new Journal, in addition to the two plates for which allowance was made in the original estimate. This charge he continued to bear for the whole of the first series of 'The Ibis,' only stipulating that the subject of each plate that he presented should be a "Bird of Prey,"—for he had already made great progress in forming the now vast and celebrated collection of "*Raptores*" in the Norwich Museum, to which institution he had been a donor in 1828, when he was but nine years of age. But he was by no means exclusively devoted to this group of birds. He bought a large portion of the ornithological collection formed by Mr. Wallace in the Malay Archipelago, and presented it to the Museum at King's Lynn (for which borough he sat as representative in the House of Commons from 1854 to 1865), while about the same time circumstances led him to take

especial interest in the ornithology of South Africa, as is shown by his numerous papers in our pages on collections made, almost entirely at his instigation, by Mr. Ayres in Natal and the Transvaal country, and by his editing in 1872 'The Birds of Damara Land' from the papers of his friend Charles John Andersson. GURNEY'S OWN communications to 'The Ibis' reach, if we have counted them rightly, the number of *one hundred and forty*, the latest being in our last number (*supra*, p. 262); and though some of them are admittedly of slight importance, it is observable of all that they deal with facts and not with fancies. As he never wrote for writing's sake, and related what he had to state in the simple and precise terms which prove the true man of science, his contributions may have sometimes seemed dull compared with the brilliant essays and daring speculations that this Journal occasionally contains from other pens; but no attentive reader can fail to discern the solid foundation on which GURNEY'S work rests, and the probability, if not the certainty, of its being consulted and found useful when theoretical treatises have passed out of mind.

The secret of this foundation is the accuracy of the information he possessed; and it is undeniable that in his knowledge of the *Accipitres* and *Striges* he stood alone. A great part of his information regarding the first of these groups he fortunately contributed to 'The Ibis' between 1875 and 1882, in a series of "Notes" on the first volume of the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum,' and on its conclusion he brought out 'A List of the Diurnal Birds of Prey, with references and annotations' (*cf.* *Ibis*, 1884, p. 456), which is indispensable to all students of these birds. This was his last important work, for though he contemplated a companion work on the Nocturnal Birds of Prey, it is believed that not a word of it was written. Indeed, for the last few years the state of his health forbade his often visiting the Museum at Norwich, where alone he could carry on the examination of specimens necessary for the execution of such a work. Some twenty years ago he was affected by a disease believed to be incurable, though its fatal effects might

be long delayed by strict attention to diet; and following closely the medical advice given him his efforts were so far successful that he may be said to have enjoyed the quiet life he led in the old family-house at Northrepps, near Cromer. Though his bodily strength gradually failed, he was only seriously ill for a few days before he calmly expired.

In the foregoing remarks the ornithological aspect of GURNEY's life has, as is here fitting, been chiefly dwelt upon. It must be added that at one time Fishes were as favourite an object of study with him as Birds, and in a general way he had a great taste for every branch of Zoology. As an antiquary also he was possessed of no inconsiderable knowledge. But more than this: it would be wrong to omit reference to his bountiful generosity, which not only showed an extraordinary kindness of heart, but was bestowed with a degree of discretion and retiring modesty that doubled its utility to the recipients. The loss, through the failure of the mercantile house in which he was concerned, of the vast income that he once enjoyed, certainly made no difference in the liberality of his disposition, though it lessened the amount he had for distribution, and caused it to be administered with even less ostentation. But among all the qualities that he possessed, perhaps a placid temper was the most characteristic. To it may possibly have been due some of his misfortunes, but it certainly enabled him to preserve the *mens æqua in adversis*.